

Chairman Dingell at the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hearing entitled "Continuing Security Concerns at Los Alamos National Laboratory"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
HEARING ENTITLED "CONTINUING SECURITY CONCERNS AT
LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY"
January 30, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today. I want to begin by congratulating our Chairman, Mr. Stupak. He has served on this Subcommittee for more than a decade and will bring effective and vigorous leadership to an aggressive oversight agenda.

Mr. Chairman, it is fitting that we are observing Groundhog Day this week. Like the character in the movie "Groundhog Day," we seem to wake up every morning only to repeat the same events over and over. Every few months we uncover yet another security breach at Los Alamos. Mr. Chairman, it is my greatest hope that you will not need to schedule a hearing early next year entitled "Ongoing Security Concerns at Los Alamos - The Sequel."

I am discouraged that this Subcommittee must again convene to hear about security breaches at the Department of Energy national labs " Los Alamos in particular. We could drag out stacks of letters sent to the Department secretaries and Presidents over the past two decades about the issue we are reviewing today. We could also display a small tower of hearing records " many of which I chaired " relating to DOE security breakdowns, many at the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Were this a movie, these ongoing security problems might make good drama. These security breaches, however, are deadly serious. They threaten our ability to safeguard our Nation's nuclear secrets. For some reason, DOE appears incapable of managing this critical security and preventing the recurring problems we will discuss today.

There is a new twist to this story which I view as a worrisome development. Apparently, this latest security breach raises serious questions about DOE's process and procedures in granting of security clearances and the adjudication of adverse information dealing with the suitability of employees and contractors. This new issue will no doubt be the subject of the executive session planned later today. We may very well need to expand our investigation into DOE's personnel security system.

Mr. Chairman, my concern today is that we will hear the same promises we have heard in the past about how DOE plans to remedy this situation: how the Lab will now take security seriously; how the Lab will be reorganized; how some officials and managers may be removed. I am weary of hearing these excuses and promises.

The time has come to focus on the adequacy of the tools DOE possesses to effectively penalize contractors and the lab for security failures and whether DOE ever intends to use them. There may be nothing in the Secretary's tool box effective enough to turn this lab around. We need to determine in today's hearings whether such penalties are sufficient to effectively improve security at Los Alamos.

I understand that Secretary Bodman is conducting yet another security review regarding Los Alamos specifically and the Department in general. I look forward to his appearance before this Committee in February to learn what he intends to do to finally fix this mess.

I support requesting the Government Accountability Office to conduct a comprehensive audit of Los Alamos's operations in order to determine what functions need to be retained there versus being moved to another government or private facility. It increasingly appears that the overall footprint of the Lab may be too big in both physical scale and the scope of its mission to be properly managed. At this point, all options should be on the table for consideration.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today. I look forward to hearing what will be said by our witnesses, but you will forgive me if I note that, as in "Groundhog Day," we have all been here before.

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